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SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS KILLINGS IN BUKAVU CREATE MARTYRS --
AND RUMORS OF POSSIBLE POLITICAL UNDERTONES

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¶1. Summary: Bukavu, dubbed the murder capital of the DRC, has been the site of targeted attacks against journalists, human rights defenders and religious authorities. A priest and a nun were assassinated within days of each other in early December provoking fear and outrage amongst the predominantly-Catholic population. Calling for justice, religious and political leaders reacted swiftly and strongly against the attacks. Possible motives for the killings include attempts to destabilize the region or political retaliation for support of Kimia II and the current government. End summary.

Bukavu: Murder capital of the Congo

¶2. South Kivu provincial capital Bukavu has another "capital" distinction: it is considered the murder capital of the Congo and for many years has been the scene of violence targeting journalists, human rights defenders, and religious authorities. Since 2007, three journalists have been killed and scores of others have been threatened in Bukavu, known as Costermansville during the Belgian colonial period. Bukavu, a picturesque mountain city situated on the southern shores of Lake Kivu, was a major administrative center until the greater Kivus province was divided into three provinces in ¶1988. Goma, on the north shore of Lake Kivu, became the capital of the province of North Kivu and has since eclipsed its sister city to the south. Many former Peace Corps volunteers know Bukavu well as the site of a major PC training center.

¶3. The latest crime wave sweeping the Bukavu area is cause for grave concern. In recent months there has been an upsurge in attacks against Catholic Church facilities in South Kivu, particularly in the area between Bukavu and Bunyakiri. This development has not gone unnoticed by the local press with several media outlets reporting on the recent murders of a Catholic priest and two nuns. The news has also been picked up in other parts of the DRC. "L'Avenir," a Kinshasa newspaper, opined recently that religious figures have become the new targets of violence.

Priest and nun assassinated

¶4. During the night of December 5-6, armed bandits in Kabare killed Father Daniel Cizimya, a Catholic priest. Two other priests managed to escape. Local police arrested three suspects and, during their transfer from Kabare to Bukavu, a mob formed demanding justice. A faction of FARDC in Kabare fired on the mob killing one person and injuring five in an attempt to restore calm. Due to the insecurity caused by the killing and the subsequent local reaction, the possibility of closing the parish was discussed. In the meantime, local officials closed public schools for three days to demonstrate their support for the church and express anger at the killing.

¶5. On Monday, December 7, just two days after Father Cizimya was killed, Sister Denise Kahambu was shot dead. Another nun, Sister Cecile, was seriously injured during the evening attack by armed men at the Notre Dame de la Clarte Monastery in Murhesa, a town 30 kilometers northwest of Bukavu. The armed attackers did not steal anything. Unconfirmed reports state that the armed men asked for the priest and, when told he was not there, they shot the nuns.

Church and state reactions to the violence
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¶6. Laurent Monsengwo, Archbishop of Kinshasa, condemned the assassinations, adding that Catholic leaders in the Eastern DRC are targeted in order to undermine the church's mission of peace and reconciliation. He urged the GDRC and MONUC to take "effective measures to stop the current escalation of violence." Father Jean Bosco Bahala, a Catholic priest involved in peace negotiations and mediation in North and South Kivu, also called for government protection, stating that the Catholic Church in Bukavu is a strong symbol of peace and help for those who have been victims of war.

¶7. The government's response has been swift and high level. In the moments immediately after the nun's death, the vice-governor and police commander appeared on the scene. President Kabila visited the site of the nun's death while in Bukavu for a Council of Ministers meeting on December 13. Vital Kamerhe, a National Assembly deputy from Bukavu, expressed his condolences to the community of Kabare after the killing of Father Daniel. On December 9, South Kivu Governor Louis Leonce Muderwa stated that "evil forces" want South Kivu to become ungovernable. He believes that the killings are an attempt to destabilize South Kivu by attacking the Catholic Church. Approximately 80% of the population in Bukavu is Catholic and these incidents could incite the believers to

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further violence creating instability. That same day, DRC Interior Minister Celestin Mbuyu led a delegation of ministers to Murhesa monastery to visit the nun's grave. Earlier the provincial security council met at the governor's residence to discuss the situation with an additional security council meeting held on December 10. According to Jean Claude Kibala, vice-governor of South Kivu, the government has launched an investigation into the killings.

A melange of explanations

¶8. As with similar incidents in the DRC, several theories have circulated regarding these assassinations. Based on the history of intimidation and extermination of journalists, some believe that the killings follow in that same vein. These are not the first incidences of specific targets against religious authorities. Bishop Christophe Munzihirwa was killed in 1996 and Bishop Emmanuel Kataliko was killed in 2000. A second theory revolves around armed militias in South Kivu. The killings pinpoint influential religious leaders and institutions in the rural areas. This may be one method to scare church leaders out of the villages and into the cities, providing free reign for these groups to loot and pillage.

¶9. In each of the attacks there is a lack of additional criminal activity beyond the murders themselves. There have been no reports of theft or looting associated with these attacks. According to an anonymous statement by a Radio Okapi journalist residing in Bukavu, "many people in Bukavu think that the perpetrators of recent killings of Catholic Church members want Bukavu Bishop Maroy to stop his support for President Kabila."

¶10. Some observers believe political agendas might also be at the root of this trend. Bureau chiefs at Radio Maria, a Catholic Church-run station in Bukavu, speculate the murders were aimed at Radio Maria, which has been critical of the Kimia II operations. These attacks could also be an attempt by the Mundundu 40, a group of Mai Mai found near Bukavu, to revive itself as a CNDP partner during Kimia II operations.

¶11. Comment: We are unable to confirm -- or dismiss -- any of these theories. In the shady, uncontrolled, rebel-ridden environment of South Kivu, motives can be intentionally ambiguous. It is telling, however, that theft and looting do not appear to be linked with the killings, pointing to the possibility of political motives. End comment.

GARVELINK